

WE CLAIM:

1. A method for processing requests for products comprising the steps, performed by a processor, of:
 - receiving a request identifying a customer and indicating one of a plurality of providers for a selected product;
 - converting a portion of the received request into a provisioning request based on the selected product; and
 - providing the provisioning request to the provider.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the converting step includes the substeps of
 - accessing a format database for stored format information of the provider; and
 - using the format information to convert the portion of the received request into the provisioning request.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of providing the provisioning request to the provider includes the substep of
 - storing information from the received request as a customer record.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of providing the provisioning request to the provider includes the substep of
 - determining a means for providing the provisioning request to the provider.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of providing the provisioning request to the provider includes the substep of electronically transmitting the provisioning request to the provider.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of providing the provisioning request to the provider includes the substep of physically delivering the provisioning request to the provider.

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7. A method for processing requests for products comprising the steps, performed by a processor, of:

receiving a request identifying a customer and including a bundle code indicating a plurality of providers for selected products;

converting portions of the received request into provisioning requests based on the code; and

providing the provisioning requests to the providers.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the converting step includes the substep of

deciphering the bundle code to identify the plurality of providers for the selected products.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein the step of providing the provisioning request to the provider includes the substep of

storing information from the received request as a customer record.

10. The method of claim 7, wherein the step of providing the provisioning requests to the providers includes the substep of

determining a means for providing each of the provisioning requests to the providers.

11. The method of claim ⁴10, wherein the step of providing the provisioning requests to the providers includes the substep of electronically transmitting or physically delivering the provisioning requests to the providers based on the determination.

12. The method of claim ²8, wherein the deciphering step includes the substep of selecting product codes corresponding to the received bundle code from a stored table.

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7 13. A method for billing customers for requested products comprising the steps, performed by a processor, of:

- receiving usage data for a customer from a plurality of providers;
- converting the usage data from each provider into a standard usage data format based on predetermined billing rules;
- storing the converted usage data;
- accessing the customer record including a plurality of codes;
- specifying a bill format from the codes;
- determining whether codes identify a selected bundle of products from at least two providers;
- computing any discount based on the result of the determination;
- computing taxes for each of the products; and
- generating a bill including the usage data in the specified format, and reflecting the computed discount and taxes.

17. A billing controller for processing requests for products comprising:
a receiver configured to receive a request identifying a customer and
indicating one of a plurality of providers for a selected product;
a converter configured to convert a portion of the received request into a
provisioning request based on the selected product; and
a component configured to provide the provisioning request to the provider.

18. The billing controller of claim 17, wherein the converter includes:
a component configured to access a format database for stored format
information of the provider and use the format information to convert the portion of
the received request into the provisioning request.

19. The billing controller of claim 17, wherein the component configured
to provide the provisioning request to the provider includes:
storage configured to store information from the received request as a
customer record.

20. The billing controller of claim 17, wherein the component configured
to provide the provisioning request to the provider includes:
means for determining a means for providing the provisioning request to the
provider.

21. The billing controller of claim 17, wherein the component configured to provide the provisioning request to the provider includes:

a transmitter configured to electronically transmit the provisioning request to the provider.

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22. A billing controller for processing requests for products comprising:
a receiver configured to receive a request identifying a customer and including
a bundle code indicating a plurality of providers for selected products;
a converter configured to convert portions of the received request into
provisioning requests based on the code; and
a component configured to provide the provisioning requests to the providers.

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23. The billing controller of claim 22, wherein the converter includes:
a decoder configured to decode the bundle code to identify the plurality of
providers for the selected products.

12 24. The billing controller of claim ¹¹22, wherein the component configured
to provide the provisioning request to the provider includes:
storage configured to store information from the received request as a
customer record.

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13 25. The billing controller of claim ¹¹22, wherein the component configured
to provide the provisioning requests to the providers includes:
a component configured to determine a means for providing each of the
provisioning requests to the providers.

14 26. The billing controller of claim ¹¹22, wherein the component configured

to provide the provisioning requests to the providers includes:

a transmitter configured to electronically transmit the provisioning requests to the providers.

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§ 27. The billing controller of claim ¹²~~23~~, wherein the decoder includes:

means for selecting product codes corresponding to the received bundle code from a stored table.

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17 28. A billing controller for billing customers for requested products comprising:

a receiver configured to receive usage data for a customer from a plurality of providers;

a converter configured to convert the usage data from each provider into a standard usage data format based on predetermined billing rules;

storage configured to store the converted usage data;

a component configured to access the customer record including a plurality of codes;

a component configured to specify a bill format from the codes;

a component configured to determine whether codes identify a selected bundle of products from at least two providers;

means for computing any discount based on the result of the determination, and the taxes for each of the products; and

a generator configured to generate a bill including the usage data in the specified format, and reflecting the computed discount and taxes.

18/29. A billing controller for billing customers for requested products comprising:

a component configured to access a stored customer record identifying a customer and including usage data and a plurality of codes;

a component configured to specify a bill format from the codes;

means for determining whether the codes identify a selected bundle of products from at least two providers; and

a generator configured to generate a bill including the usage data in the specified format.

19/30. The billing controller of claim 29, wherein the generator includes:
means for computing any discount based on the result of the determination;
and
means for using the computed discount in generating the bill.

20/31. The billing controller of claim 29, wherein the generator includes:
means for computing taxes for each of the products; and
means for using the computed taxes in generating the bill.

35. The computer program product of claim 32, wherein provisioning module includes

a module configured to determine a means for providing the provisioning request to the provider.

36. The computer program product of claim 32, wherein the provisioning module includes:

a module configured to electronically transmit the provisioning request to the provider.

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37. A computer program product comprising:

a computer usable medium having computable readable code embodied therein for processing requests for products, the computer usable medium comprising:

a receiving module configured to receive a request identifying a customer and including a bundle code indicating a plurality of providers for selected products;

a converting module configured to convert portions of the received request into provisioning requests based on the code; and

a provisioning module configured to provide the provisioning requests to the providers.

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38. The computer program product of claim 37, wherein the converting module includes:

a module configured to decipher the bundle code to identify the plurality of providers for the selected products.

39. The computer program product of claim 37, wherein the provisioning module includes:

a module configured to store information from the received request as a customer record.

40. The computer program product of claim 37, wherein the provisioning module includes:

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a module configured to determine a means for providing each of the provisioning requests to the providers.

41. The computer program product of claim 37, wherein the provisioning module includes:

a module configured to electronically transmit the provisioning requests to the providers based on the determination.

42. The computer program product of claim 38, wherein the deciphering module includes:

a module configured to select product codes corresponding to the received bundle code from a stored table.

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29 43. A computer program product comprising:

a computer usable medium having computable readable code embodied therein for billing customers for requested products, the computer usable medium comprising:

a receiving module configured to receive usage data for a customer from a plurality of providers;

a converting module configured to convert the usage data from each provider into a standard usage data format based on predetermined billing rules;

a module configured to store the converted usage data;

a module configured to access the customer record including a plurality of codes;

a module configured to specify a bill format from the codes;

a module configured to determine whether codes identify a selected bundle of products from at least two providers;

a computing module configured to compute any discount based on the result of the determination and taxes for each of the products; and

a generating module configured to generate a bill including the usage data in the specified format, and reflecting the computed discount and taxes.

09002276-133197

31 47. A data processing system for billing customers for requested products, comprising:

a usage gateway controller configured to receive usage data for a customer from a plurality of providers and to convert the usage data from each provider into a standard usage data format based on predetermined billing rules;

a central controller, connected to the usage gateway controller, configured to (a) store the converted usage data, (b) access the customer record including a plurality of codes, (c) specify a bill format from the codes, (d) determine whether codes identify a selected bundle of products from at least two providers, (e) compute any discount based on the result of the determination, (f) compute taxes for each of the products, and (g) generate a bill including the usage data in the specified format and reflecting the computed discount and taxes.

32 48. The system of claim 47, further comprising:

a request-processing gateway controller, connected to the central controller, configured to receive customer requests for products; and

a service-provider gateway controller, connected to the central controller, configured to receive the customer requests via the central controller and to distribute the customer requests to selected providers.